

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASMARA 00138 180815Z

ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4377

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0138

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ET

SUBJECT: REPORTS OF DISCONTENT IN MILITARY PERSIST

REF: ASMARA 0126 (DTG 150540Z FEB 77)

1. SEVERAL SOURCES HAVE NOW CONFIRMED THAT THE DETENTION OF THE DELEGATION FROM THE SECOND DIVISION IN ADDIS HAS RESULTED IN A SIMILAR DETENTION OF THE DELEGATION FROM THE PMAC IN ASMARA (REFTEL). THE TERMS OF THE DETENTION IN BOTH INSTANCES APPARENTLY ARE RATHER LENIENT, AMOUNTING TO CONFINING THE DELEGATION MEMBERS TO MILITARY BASES AND PROHIBITING THEM FROM RETURNING TO THEIR RESPECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS.

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PAGE 02 ASMARA 00138 180815Z

2. THERE IS A REPORT THAT THE DETENTION OF THE PMAC DELEGATION WAS ACCOMPANIED BY AN ULTIMATUM FROM THE SECOND DIVISION TO THE DIRG DEMANDING A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT OF THE ERITREAN PROBLEM AND A REORGANIZATION OF THE DIRG PERMITTING GREATER REPRESENTATION FOR THE EPMG FORCES IN ERITREA. THE ALLEGED ULTIMATUM GIVES THE DIRG 15 DAYS FROM FEB 10 TO COMPLY, OR THE SECOND DIVISION WILL

NO LONGER OBEY ORDERS FROM ADDIS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS THE IMPORT OF THIS REPORT, IF IT IS ACCURATE, BECAUSE IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT THERE IS RAMPANT FACTIONALISM WITHIN THE EPMG MILITARY IN ERITREA. ENLISTED MEN BALK AT ORDERS, AND OFFICERS, WHILE AGREED ON THE NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE, DISAGREE ON WHETHER THE ERITREAN SITUATION SHOULD BE RESOLVED BY NEGOTIATION OR MILITARY FORCE.

3. ANOTHER INDICATION OF THE DISSATISFACTION OF THE SECOND DIVISION TO MENGHISTU'S PURGE WAS THE DISTRIBUTION ON FEB 14 OF ANTI-MENGHISTU LEAFLETS IN A MILITARY DEPENDENTS CAMP AND A POLICE RESIDENTIAL COMPOUND. THE LEAFLETS, WHICH WERE DISTRIBUTED AT NIGHT, WERE LIMITED TO A DENUNCIATION OF MENGHISTU FOR THE EXECUTION OF TEFERI BENTI AND OTHER DIRG MEMBERS. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS NO ATTRIBUTION ON THE LEAFLETS, DISCONTENTED MEMBERS OF THE ARMY ARE CREDITED WITH THEIR DISTRIBUTION.

4. ANOTHER CREDIBLE INDICATION OF DISSENTION WITHIN THE ARMY IS THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY CONDUCT THEIR ROUTINE MILITARY OPERATIONS. AT THE MOMENT, THE PICTURE IS MIXED. THE LAST CONVOY FROM MASSAWA ARRIVED IN ASMARA ON FEB 12, AND AS A RESULT SALES OF GASOLINE ARE AGAIN SUSPENDED. THERE ARE RUMORS THAT THE MASSAWA CONVOYS WILL NOT OPERATE FOR A PERIOD OF TWO WEEKS. A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THE SUSPENSION OF THESE CONVOYS IS THAT THE SECOND DIVISION TROOPS NORMALLY USED FOR ESCORT DUTY ARE ENGAGED IN AN OPERATION TO CLEAR THE ROAD FROM ASMARA TO ADI UGRI. SOME 100 TRUCKS ARE LOADED FOR ADI UGRI CARRYING FOOD, BEVERAGES AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, DIESEL FUEL FOR THE RADIO RELAY STATION WHICH MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO BROADCAST ADDIS RADIO IN NORTHERN ETHIOPIA. THE FIGHTING
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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ASMARA 00138 180815Z

BROKE OUT FEB 14 WHEN INSURGENTS ROCKETED THE EPMG STRONGHOLD LOCATED AT THE FORMER COPPER MINE NEAR DEBAROA (29 KM SOUTH OF ASMARA). THE NEXT MORNING EPMG ESCORT TROOPS ACCOMPANIED BY TANKS AND APCS MOVED DOWN THE ADI UGRI ROAD. THEY MET INSURGENT RESISTANCE AT SALADARO (13 KM SOUTH OF ASMARA) AND WITHDREW TO PERMIT AIR STRIKES IN THE AREA. ON FEB 16, THEY BROKE THROUGH TO DEBAROA AND DROVE OFF THE INSURGENT ATTACKERS. THE CONVOY REMAINS IN ASMARA, HOWEVER, AWAITING WORD THAT THE ROAD IS OPEN.

5. THE ONLY OTHER MILITARY ACTIVITY OF NOTE WAS THE TRANSFER OF AT LEAST 500 TROOPS TO KEREN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WEEK. EIGHTEEN LOADED DC-3 AIRCRAFT WERE OBSERVED LANDING IN KEREN DURING A SEVEN-HOUR PERIOD ON FEB 14. THESE TROOPS ARE THOUGHT TO BE COMMANDO POLICE, NEWLY-ARRIVED IN ERITREA, WHO ARE BEING SENT TO REPLACE RECENT LOSSES INCURRED BY THE COMMANDO POLICE BATTALIONS IN KEREN. THE FIGHTING AT ELABERET IS REPORTED TO HAVE SUBSIDED WITH THE BELEAGUERED ETHIOPIAN DEFENDERS STILL HOLDING THEIR POSITION.
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